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- Today's Insider (PDF)



YOU DON'T SAY...

"I'd rather have 85 percent of something than 100 percent of nothing."

Rep. John Szoka, R-Cumberland, on concessions made on the wind energy moratorium.

THE (Elizabeth City) DAILY ADVANCE, 3/25/18

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News Summary

Appointed

The state Senate District 4 Democratic executive committee has selected Milton "Toby" Fitch Jr. to replace state Sen. Angela Bryant, who resigned her position on Monday. Fitch, the only Democrat who filed for election to the District 4 Senate seat, was nominated Friday at the Halifax County Ag Center by executive committee members Gwen Wilkins (Nash County) and Zette McArn (Wilson County). The committee unanimously supported his nomination. "Toby Fitch is no stranger to politics or eastern North Carolina," said Kim Mack, chairwoman of the Senate District 4 executive committee. "He brings a wealth of experience of the North Carolina General Assembly and the issues facing us." Wilkins said, "He has experience and concern for the citizens, and he will help those who cannot help themselves." McArn added, "He is not shy about raising his voice for you and for me."

Last month Fitch retired from serving as a Superior Court Judge, a position he held for more than 16 years starting in 2001. Before that he served in the NC House of the General Assembly, representing Edgecombe and Wilson counties, from 1984 to 2001. Fitch said in his statement of candidacy in February that he is focusing on new job creation, better infrastructure, attracting new business and industry and improving technological advances. "I never take anything for granted, that is why I love the democratic process," Fitch said on Friday.

About his executive committee selection on Friday, Fitch said, "Some people say it went mighty fast; I say it felt like a lifetime trying to get to this point. These are good citizens in this particular District 4, as it's now presently constituted. I'm sorry that district is changing. I have a close affinity and relations with all those who are present from the other counties that are leaving the 4th. I pledge to remember this day, and to remember those counties and those individuals who participated in the process."

This year, as Fitch noted, redistricting has moved three counties out of the 4th district and added one leaving Halifax, Edgecombe and Wilson counties represented. A letter of certification has been delivered to Gov. Roy Cooper. Cooper has 10 days to make the appointment, or Fitch will be automatically appointed after the 10th day. (Carolyn Harmon, THE (Roanoke Rapids) DAILY HERALD, 3/25/18)

Spellings Bonus

UNC President Margaret Spellings was awarded a \$95,000 performance bonus Friday by the UNC Board of Governors following her annual review. The bonus will be split, with \$50,000 to be paid in cash and \$45,000 to be paid into a retirement account for Spellings, said Lou Bissette, chairman of the board. He said the amount was decided after the board's presidential assessment committee concluded Spellings had met or exceeded expectations.

The vote by the board, at its meeting at UNC Wilmington, occurred after a closed session discussion that lasted more than two and a half hours. Three board members dissented on the bonus -- former state legislators Thom Goolsby and Robert Rucho, and Tom Fetzer. After the vote, Fetzer explained why he voted against the bonus.

"I don't think it was warranted," he said. "At a base salary of \$775,000, I think the taxpaying citizens of North Carolina ought to be able to expect excellence in performance without having to add on a hundred grand a year. Also, if we're serious about controlling the costs of higher education, this doesn't help us achieve that." Spellings received a \$90,000 bonus last March. At that point, the board said her future incentive pay could rise up to \$125,000 annually.

The bonus comes at Spellings' two-year anniversary leading the 17-campus public university system. She was hired in 2016 with a base salary of \$775,000 and a five-year contract. At the time, the

system described her salary as "highly competitive for public higher education executive talent." Her predecessor, Tom Ross, was paid \$600,000. She thanked the board after its vote. She is the first UNC president to have an incentive bonus as part of her compensation package.

This week, Spellings started on a statewide tour, where she is giving "State of the University" speeches at eight stops across North Carolina. She spoke in Charlotte and Wilmington this week, focusing on the university system's strategic plan, which aims to educate more low-income and rural students, improve graduation rates and make an economic impact on North Carolina. "Success will demand a statewide push to create a college-going culture, a culture of accountability where priority is placed on extending opportunity for all, and advancing the public values we all share," Spellings said Friday. (Jane Stancill, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Foreign Campaign Workers

A report from NBC News claims foreign nationals employed by Cambridge Analytica were embedded in North Carolina in 2014, working on the U.S. Senate campaign of Thom Tillis. The Tillis campaign says the report is untrue. NBC cites two former Cambridge Analytica employees, one unnamed, who claim direct knowledge of the matter. Its main source is Christopher Wylie, an early employee of Cambridge Analytica and its parent company, military contractor SCL.

Wylie, a Canadian, has been prominent in recent reports that SCL and Cambridge Analytica improperly obtained the private personal data of more than 50 million Facebook users without their knowledge. The data, according to Wylie, was used for "psychographic profiling" for political campaigns. North Carolina's 2014 Senate race was one of the first U.S. contests Cambridge Analytica worked on. Involvement by non-citizens in U.S. campaigns is a gray area in elections law, depending on the extent to which the individuals influenced decisions about campaign expenditures.

The role of the alleged campaign workers in Tillis' campaign is not entirely clear in the report. However, Wylie claims he was instrumental in designing and targeting the messaging for the candidate. Tillis' mailers Cambridge Analytica worked on these mailers from the 2014 US Senate race. According to the NBC story, Wylie said he "couldn't recall any American Cambridge employees working on the Tillis campaign."

"There were three or four full-time CA staffers embedded in Tillis's campaign on the ground in Raleigh," Wylie said. "All of them were foreign nationals."

In a statement Saturday afternoon to WRAL News, the Tillis campaign denied the report. "This is an embarrassingly sloppy and factually false article by NBC News, which apparently doesn't understand that a candidate's campaign and a state party are not the same things. The Tillis campaign committee was based in and operated out of Cornelius, not Raleigh. Contrary to the false 'reporting' by NBC News, Cambridge Analytica staffers were not embedded in the Tillis campaign," the statement said. "Had NBC News bothered to do basic fact checking beforehand, they would have avoided the embarrassment of putting out this misinformation."

According to NBC, a second former Cambridge Analytica senior employee confirmed Wylie's version of events. Cambridge Analytica's website highlights its work for the Tillis campaign as a success story. Federal campaign finance records show the Tillis campaign paid the firm \$30,000 in 2014 and another \$100,000 in 2015 for "micro-targeting."

On Tuesday, Tillis told WRAL News that the firm's role in his campaign was "limited" and said it would be "deeply disturbing" if the firm had misled his campaign about the legality of its services.

The network story cites an unnamed North Carolina Republican Party spokesman as saying the Cambridge Analytica contractors in North Carolina were working for the party, not directly for the Tillis campaign. The spokesman also told NBC that the data-mining firm "is not accused of breaking any law or FEC rules during its work in North Carolina in 2014," adding that neither the party nor Tillis has been accused of doing anything "wrong, unethical, or unlawful." Federal campaign finance

records show the state party paid Cambridge Analytica \$215,000 in 2014 and 2015. The party was the firm's fourth-largest client in 2014.

In an interview with WRAL News, NCGOP director Dallas Woodhouse, who was not with the party in 2014, could neither confirm nor deny that any Cambridge Analytica personnel were working for the party on the ground in North Carolina in 2014. "I don't know whether that's true or not or whether they had a foreign nationality," Woodhouse told WRAL News. "We would tell a vendor they had to act openly and ethically and within the law, and if they don't, that would prevent them from future work," Woodhouse added. "We don't have any plans to work with them anyway and haven't in four years. One of the reasons is because the [Republican National Committee] data is so good, and it's a heck of a lot cheaper." (Laura Leslie, WRAL NEWS, 3/25/18)

Aging Equipment

Lawmakers heard a proposal for a new statewide tax schedule for farm and ranch equipment after the North Carolina Department of Revenue found that counties didn't uniformly tax the equipment. Tony Simpson, director of the local government division of the NCDOR, had previously discussed excluding aging tractors from a county's tax with lawmakers, but on Thursday he presented new information about excluding all aging farm and ranch equipment to the Agriculture and Forestry Awareness Study Commission. NCDOR found that counties use a combination of ways to appraise general farm equipment, because they're not required to use the department's manual, but 45 percent of the counties that did respond used the recommended eight-year life schedule.

If all the farm equipment was exempted from property taxes, Simpson said across 40 counties that responded to NCDOR's survey, there would be a total loss of about \$9.1 million in tax revenue. According to the survey, the majority of farm equipment in the state is 16 to 20 years old. "What I found interesting is we've got almost as much farm equipment 35-45 years old in the state as we do that's five years old," Simpson said. "So it's obvious this equipment stays in use for a long time." Simpson proposed a way to tax all farm and ranch equipment that would help consistency across counties.

All the equipment would be put on a 10-year schedule -- even though many are in use for 20 or 25 years -- with a 25 percent residual value. By putting all equipment on one schedule, it would prevent counties from having to separate out equipment, Simpson said. It would also allow for mass appraisal and simplify the data entries. A legislative committee did not take any action on the proposal last week. (Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 3/26/18)

Gun Violence

Rocky Mount police chief James Moore brought a blunt question to a statewide meeting of county health directors in Raleigh last year. Why don't more public health professionals work to reduce gun violence that disproportionately kills black citizens in this state? State data obtained by North Carolina Health News confirmed the disparity. In fact, black residents ages 20 to 29 died from firearm assaults at seven times the rate of other North Carolinians in recent years.

Shootings also threaten people out of the line of fire, Moore stressed. Children in some urban neighborhoods regularly hear or see gunshots, exposures that can bring potential long-term health risks. "There are some blocks that don't go a week without someone's house getting shot into. I'm talking you are in there cooking, bathing your children or sleeping and rounds are going into your house," Moore said. "No one is helping them."

Gun violence in North Carolina is not primarily a schoolhouse issue. Gun murders here occur in private dwellings, outdoors or in vehicles most frequently, not classrooms. Recently retired from 30 years in police work, Moore is one of a growing number of civic-minded North Carolinians calling for more than arrests and criminal prosecution to reduce this harm. If this state can commit millions of dollars to reduce opioid overdoses, which disproportionately affects whites, he and other advocates say, why not work to disrupt gun violence too? Both stem from illegal activity; both have complex

roots.

Between 2006 and 2015, 58 percent of the 3,992 people who died from gun assaults in North Carolina were black, according to state data. Only 22 percent of the state's population is African American. More than half of the 2,328 African Americans killed with guns during that period were younger than 30. And that racial disparity holds for firearm assaults. Racial data is not collected for every person treated in a hospital for a gunshot wound in this state. But the state's 14 trauma centers tallied data on their 3,305 firearm assault patients between 2013 and 2017; 74 percent of those patients were black.

Because there is limited research on firearm violence, assumptions and potentially racial bias may fill in for facts when people consider what causes shootings, said UNC-Chapel Hill epidemiologist Shabbar I. Ranapurwala. "Firearm violence among black Americans is frequently dismissed as gang violence or black-on-black crime rather than being addressed as a public health problem," said Ranapurwala, who has helped document disparities in federally funded studies researching life-threatening risks among black and white Americans.

Eric Toschlog, chief of trauma and surgical critical care at Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, has become a shooting prevention advocate. He says he is weary of watching young black men die while he tries to save their lives at Vidant Medical Center in Greenville, where he practices. Toschlog is collaborating with data scientist Sharon Schiro of the North Carolina Trauma Registry to map where shootings occur. That could help target future interventions for gun assaults.

The mapping will include locating suicides too, which kill more people in North Carolina than gun assaults. Nearly two-thirds (60.5 percent) of all violent deaths in N.C. during 2015 were caused by firearms, including suicide (62.1 percent), homicide (34.6 percent).

The U.S. Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council have proposed a research agenda that could acquire data needed to help guide prevention of gun violence. Some efforts to intervene have already been launched in North Carolina. A prevention strategy called Cure Violence Model inspired a public health project called Bull City United in Durham County. Participants use a disease-control model, including finding people at high risk of shooting someone and working with them to prevent assaults.

Reducing shootings where they are most common is an urgent need, said Greenville police chief Mark Holtzman, whose department staffs a gun violence prevention unit. Otherwise people who live in neighborhoods plagued by shootings, and those who live elsewhere, can start to view the violence as inevitable. After Moore spoke in Raleigh last year, Madison County health director Marianna Daly told him she had tried but failed to convince members of the N.C. Association of Local Health Directors to formally characterize gun violence as a public health hazard. More than a year later, longtime Pitt County Health Director John Morrow revived Daly's idea, which members will consider. Morrow was inspired by high school students demanding more protection after the Florida shooting. The North Carolina association has been slow to engage this issue, acknowledged current president Dennis Joyner. That's probably due to the divisive politics regarding gun control policies and the lack of science-based guidance on prevention, he said. (Catherine Clabby, NC HEALTH NEWS, 3/23/18)

Boswell Criticism

A North Carolina legislator who was recently scolded by the state Board of Nursing for identifying herself as a nurse faces a challenger who says he's providing a "truthful" alternative for Republican primary voters. State Rep. Beverly Boswell, R-Dare, faced criticism Wednesday and made national headlines after the North Carolina Board of Nursing disclosed that it had asked Boswell twice to stop referring to herself as a registered nurse online. Boswell, a phlebotomist who's up for re-election this fall, said a campaign worker misidentified her on her Facebook page and website.

That was a step too far for Bobby Hanig, Boswell's opponent in the Republican primary. Hanig -- who only two days ago invoked President Ronald Reagan's commandment to never speak ill of another

Republican -- released a statement encouraging voters in NC House District 6 to vote for a "truthful" conservative. The statement doesn't mention Boswell by name but alludes to her in subtle jabs. It says Hanig, chairman of the Currituck County Board of Commissioners, stands by his "legitimate, truthful record of being a true conservative."

It notes that Hanig is an Army veteran, but is "not claiming to the Chief of Staff of the Army," adding that Hanig is "fastidious about honor and integrity, noting that 'My word is my bond.' He believes that candidates, before and after getting elected, always should be truthful in presenting themselves and their views." Hanig ends his statement with a punch, saying "Do not disrespect those who have completed specific exams or obtained necessary licenses to earn a title, such as lawyers, doctors, or even nurses." He quoted a line that he attributed to Albert Einstein: "Anyone who doesn't take truth seriously in small matters cannot be trusted with large ones either."

Thursday night, Boswell doubled-down on her claim that the mistake was made by "an overeager campaign volunteer." "We have restricted access to both the website and the FB page to ensure this doesn't happen again and have verified the accuracy of all info currently posted," Boswell said in a statement. The statement notes that her biographical information on her legislative webpage is correct, adding "Representative Boswell has never personally claimed to be a registered nurse." The winner of the Republican primary will likely go on to face Democrat Tess Judge. The primary is May 8. (Paul A. Specht, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

UNC Tuition

On Friday, the UNC Board of Governors approved the 2018-19 tuition and fee rates for the 16 universities. In-state tuition will be flat at most campuses, but three universities -- Elizabeth City State, UNC Pembroke and Western Carolina -- will see a substantial decrease, thanks to the NC Promise program, a reduced tuition plan funded by the legislature. At those campuses, tuition will be \$1,000 a year for in-state students and \$5,000 for out-of-state students.

But fee charges will rise at most campuses, and a new fee at UNC-Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School will mean a \$2,000-a-year hike for undergraduate majors and \$1,000 for minors. The controversial fee was proposed by the business school in order to grow enrollment by 50 percent to meet a growing demand by students. Tuition passed overwhelmingly by the board at its meeting at UNC Wilmington, but the fee vote was divided, with five members dissenting.

"In the prior 10 years in the system, we've doubled tuition on our students and parents in the state and now we're raising it even higher," said Thom Goolsby, a board member from Wilmington, who voted no. "Our constitution requires us to make it as free as possible." Board member Tom Fetzer, also from Wilmington, pointed out that the largest percentage fee increase proposals came from campuses that serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

"We have got to find a way to get more revenue to these institutions," Fetzer said. "As we travel around and visit the campuses, we can easily see the differential in resources and quality of infrastructure. ... We've got to do something about that, because some of these institutions really need our help, and they can't get there by increasing costs on the families of the students that they're trying to recruit."

The board agreed it would conduct a close examination of tuition and fee policies in the months ahead -- with a particular eye to the issue of what should and shouldn't be funded with mandatory student fees. Included in that discussion may be a strategy for different out-of-state tuition rates for campuses that are located near the state borders. The total cost of attendance for North Carolina residents would be \$19,934 at NCCU, \$22,762 at NCSU and \$23,826 at UNC-Chapel Hill, not accounting for any financial aid a student might qualify for.

The board had told campuses to hold the line on in-state tuition this year, though out-of-state tuition increases were allowed. Out-of-state tuition won't increase at some schools, but it will rise at others, including a 4 percent hike at N.C. State.

In other business, the board announced candidates for new officers for the board. The board officer election will happen in May. Running unopposed are:

- Harry Smith, a Greenville businessman, for chairman
- Randy Ramsey, a Beaufort businessman, for vice chairman
- Pearl Burris-Floyd, a former legislator from Dallas, for a second term as secretary

(Jane Stancill, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Pittenger Primary

Two years ago it was the closest congressional race in North Carolina. Charlotte Republican Mark Harris came within just 134 votes of defeating incumbent U.S. Rep. Robert Pittenger in the GOP primary. But a recent poll by the conservative Civitas Institute showed Harris trailing Pittenger by 32 points in a Republican primary widely seen as North Carolina's most competitive. As recently as last fall it drew national attention as a sort of proxy battle between the GOP establishment and its populist base.

Harris, who stepped down last year from the pulpit of Charlotte's First Baptist Church, believes the race "is a lot closer than the poll would indicate." "People now are just starting to get engaged," he said. But if the poll is right, what's happened since 2016?

Two years ago, the 9th District had just been redrawn. A district that had run through Mecklenburg from Iredell to Union counties suddenly stretched from southeast Charlotte to Fayetteville, through counties that had been represented by someone else. And there was a strong third candidate, former Union County commissioner Todd Johnson. He went on to win five of eight counties. This year a third candidate, Clarence Goins of Cumberland County, entered the race late and remains relatively unknown.

"The big difference between two years ago and today is, in all actuality, that was an open seat because of redistricting and you had a third personality in the race," said Dan Barry, the Union County Republican chairman. "Today Congressman Pittenger ... has had two years to meet his constituents Down East. That's why the data looks like it looks." Pittenger has been able to outspend Harris significantly. A heavy TV buy that started last month is expected to stay on the air through the May 8 election. Then there's the value of incumbency.

Thursday night, for example, Pittenger attended the Cumberland County Republican convention. He remained in Fayetteville on Friday where he joined GOP Rep. Richard Hudson in co-hosting a meeting of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. It met at a site just down the road from Fort Bragg. "I think it's clear that what happened two years ago made an impression on the Pittenger campaign," said James Baker, Cumberland County's Republican chairman. "They seem to be working very hard."

The \$1.3 trillion spending bill Congress passed Thursday illustrates one difference between the candidates. "President Trump promised to make America great again," Pittenger said after supporting the measure. "This legislation rebuilds our military, gives our troops the biggest pay raise in eight years, starts work on a border wall, steps up the fight against opioids, and extends multiple pro-life policies. . . . President Trump and I are committed to making our troops a priority."

Pittenger also supported an earlier spending bill that stopped a brief government shutdown. Trump signed the bill, which experts said could add \$2 trillion to the national debt. The measure was opposed by many conservative Republicans.

Harris, who opposed both spending bills, said: "Republicans are not acting like Republicans."

Pittenger has enlisted high-profile help. House Speaker Paul Ryan sent a fundraising letter. Former presidential adviser Karl Rove stumped with Pittenger in Charlotte. A Union County fundraiser featured N.C. Senate leader Phil Berger. And former United Nations Ambassador John Bolton, who will become Trump's new national security adviser, is still scheduled to headline a March 28 fundraiser at Myers Park Country Club. Aside from former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, Harris has leaned on supporters in the district, including his evangelical base by appearing in churches and before church groups. But despite carrying two counties and finishing second in all the others in 2016, he's still fighting for recognition, according to the Civitas Poll. Six in 10 likely primary voters are neutral or have no opinion of Harris, according to the poll. That compares to 34 percent who fall into those categories for Pittenger. (Jim Morrill, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Cardinal Investigation

The results of an independent investigation into controversial actions by Cardinal Innovations' former executive director and board of directors will be revealed Monday at the agency's Charlotte headquarters. Cardinal oversees providers of services for mental health, developmental disabilities and substance abuse for more than 850,000 Medicaid enrollees in 20 counties, including Forsyth and five others in the Triad. It handles more than \$675 million in annual federal and state Medicaid money.

The investigation by McGuireWoods LLP was requested by a reconstituted board, formed in January and approved by state health Secretary Mandy Cohen, along with interim chief executive Trey Sutten. It was conducted by McGuireWoods partner Kurt Meyers, a former federal prosecutor. The agency said the news conference will focus on "activities leading up to the termination of, and severance payment made, to" Richard Topping. It will feature a presentation by Meyers and a question-and-answer period.

"We're having an independent investigation to determine how the severance was being paid," Sutten told legislators during an oversight committee meeting in February. "We're collecting the facts and we fully intend to get to the bottom of this." The news conference will follow a two-day Cardinal board meeting that ended Saturday. (Richard Craver, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL, 3/24/18)

Pipeline Mailers

The state Democratic Party has sent out mailers targeting Republican lawmakers from eastern North Carolina, telling voters they "raided" money that would have helped create jobs in the area. Unmentioned in the fliers: That the \$58 million in question was re-allocated to schools in eight eastern counties. There's also no mention of the controversy surrounding Gov. Roy Cooper's negotiation of the fund.

It's unclear how many fliers went out. Party spokesman Robert Howard declined to say what districts were targeted or how much was spent. The two lawmakers WRAL News has seen fliers targeting, state Sen. Danny Britt and state Rep. Brenden Jones, appear on a list of top legislative targets Democrats shared with reporters this week. "Republicans stepped on a landmine with their political, partisan attacks on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline fund and put new districts in rural, eastern North Carolina into play," Howard said in an email.

Republicans, saying they were shocked to find the governor attempting to oversee such a large fund outside of the state treasury, passed a law to move the money to public schools along the pipeline route. The governor has said this may mean the money is never paid, but the energy companies behind the pipeline haven't indicated they plan to withhold funding. Attempts to reach Jones and Britt Friday weren't immediately successful, but Republicans have repeatedly criticized Cooper's handling of the fund. They've all but dared him to be against school funding increases in the rural counties along the pipeline's route, which roughly parallels Interstate 95 from Northampton County to Robeson County. (Travis Fain, WRAL NEWS, 3/23/18)

Conflict of Interest

Tom Adams, chairman of the N.C. State Ports Authority, said he does not plan to campaign after filing to run in a Republican primary against incumbent Brunswick County Commissioner Randy Thompson. "I am not actively campaigning," he said. "There was a potential and probable conflict of interest to the Port Authority" if he had won the race.

Adams, of Ocean Isle Beach, has served as chairman of the ports authority board since being appointed by former Gov. Pat McCrory in 2014. Had he defeated Thompson, the board vice chairman, and chosen to accept the nomination, Adams may have had to resign his position on the ports board. He said he will not support Thompson's candidacy. Asked why, Adams said: "I would prefer not to answer that question." He will, however, remain on the ballot for the May 8 primary election because the deadline to withdraw from the race was Feb. 23, said Brunswick County Elections Director Sara Knotts. (Tim Buckland, WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS, 3/23/18)

Congressional Hearing

Minutes after taking part in a special congressional hearing in Fayetteville, Sarah Verardo said it wasn't enough. Not yet. Verardo, executive director of The Independence Fund and wife of an 82nd Airborne Division veteran who lost his leg in Afghanistan in 2010, praised the meeting, a special field hearing of the House Veteran's Affairs Committee, but said words alone would not help the problems her family and others like them face on a daily basis.

Four House Republicans gathered as part of the hearing, which was hosted by Fayetteville Technical Community College. They included two members of the committee -- chairman Rep. Phil Roe of Tennessee and Rep. Neal Dunn of Florida -- and two congressmen representing Fayetteville and the surrounding communities -- Reps. Richard Hudson and Robert Pittenger. The oversight hearing included a discussion of bureaucratic hurdles to care through the Department of Veterans Affairs and ways to improve that care through community programs and better relationships with outside healthcare networks.

The four congressmen heard from a panel of experts that included Verardo; David Catoe, the assistant vice president for patient financial services at Atrium Health; Chief Master Sgt. Daryl D. Cook of the North Carolina Air National Guard; retired U.S. Staff Sgt. Gary B. Goodwin; and DeAnne Seekins, the director of the VA's Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network.

Roe said the field hearing gave the committee an opportunity to hear from veterans where they live, rather than from officials in Washington. He said the best ideas for reform often come from outside Capitol Hill. "This is a formal, official congressional hearing and will go into the Congressional Record," he said.

Roe and Dunn each praised Hudson and Pittenger for their efforts to help local veterans. And the two local congressmen said they were committed to improving access to VA care. The panel of experts discussed how the massive VA bureaucracy has hampered that care in the past. (Drew Brooks, THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Chicken Factory

Ana Monter's family brought her to the United States when she was a child, like many other immigrants chasing the American dream. But they were so poor as she was growing up that she started working in a Chatham County chicken factory at age 15 to help support her family. She dropped out of school to work full-time and eventually saved up enough money to start a family and buy a mobile home of her own, just yards away from the factory in Siler City. Now, she's terrified the new owners of that factory -- which has received millions of dollars in taxpayer-funded incentives to re-open the plant -- are about to condemn her and her children to homelessness.

The company that bought the chicken processing plant in 2016, Mountaire Farms, also recently bought the trailer park where Monter lives. The new owners plan to pave it over as they expand their operations. The expansion means more jobs for people in the area, which was devastated

economically when the plant closed down in 2011. But it also means Monter and around 100 of her neighbors, including many Spanish-speaking immigrants, are facing eviction.

But they're fighting for more time -- and more financial help -- to find a new place to live. As of Friday morning, negotiations between Mountaire and the neighbors were ongoing. The neighbors have also asked officials in Chatham County and Siler City to help them out. The two local governments gave Mountaire a combined \$2.3 million in tax breaks and other incentives. The state also gave Mountaire \$1.6 million.

That state money has since been returned as officials seek an even larger sum, due to the larger number of jobs they're promising to create. However, the grant remains part of an ethics complaint filed against N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore, a Republican from Cleveland County near Charlotte. A company Moore co-owns bought the then-abandoned factory in 2013 and sold it to Mountaire in 2016 for nearly five times as much as the 2013 price. A Washington-based watchdog group, the Campaign for Accountability, said there should be an investigation into whether Moore misused his political power to get that grant approved, and to pressure state regulators to go easy on pollution violations on the site. Moore has denied doing anything wrong. (Will Doran, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Fisherman Definition

A controversial proposal that would tighten the definition of a commercial fisherman in North Carolina is stalled at the Division of Marine Fisheries for now, even as it still sparks strong feelings with both commercial and recreational fishermen. During its February meeting, the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission narrowly approved recommending to the N.C. General Assembly a proposal that would, among other things, require commercial fishermen to record at least 1,000 pounds of fish caught or 15 trips in any two of a running five-year period.

Supporters of the proposal believe it will help some of North Carolina's struggling fisheries, limiting fishermen who use a commercial license to skirt recreational limits. In the commercial fishing community, though, the proposal has been met with alarm and concern that any changes to the existing commercial license set-up would cause already struggling fishermen further pain.

The original proposal advanced by a Marine Fisheries Commission committee called for a fisherman to earn at least 50 percent of his income from fishing to qualify for a commercial license, raising the concern of the fishing community. The proposal will soon be in the hands of the General Assembly, even though a letter advancing it has not yet been sent, according to a Marine Fisheries spokeswoman. There is, however, skepticism on both sides of the discussion that it will lead to legislation in the upcoming short session.

Jerry Schill advocates for commercial fishermen as the director of government relations for the N.C. Fisheries Association. He said the General Assembly could, ultimately, do nothing with this letter, just as they did with one a short time ago. "It's not the first time they've received a letter from the commission on this issue," Schill said. "They received one last year, and nobody did it in the General Assembly." (Adam Wagner, WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS, 3/23/18)

Flu Deaths

North Carolina's deadliest flu season in at least a decade has claimed another 23 victims, state health officials said Thursday. The total of flu-related deaths extended its modern-day record to 328. The overall death total includes eight from the week that ended March 17. It also included 15 who died in previous weeks and were later determined to have had the flu. By comparison, the most deaths for any week -- so far -- was 50 for the week that ended Feb. 17. The number of confirmed flu cases shows the season reached its peak between Feb. 10 and Feb. 17. (Richard Craver, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL, 3/25/18)

Gun Control March

As supporters of stricter gun control laws descended on Washington, D.C., for the national March For Our Lives rally, thousands of local activists also took to the streets in downtown Raleigh and across the state on Saturday. The wave of protests across the nation has been inspired largely by recent school shootings like the one in Parkland, Fla., that killed 17 people. Teenagers have been involved in organizing many of the protests, including the one in Raleigh. "We are the future, and we can be the change we want to see in the world," 15-year-old Lauren Smith told the crowd gathered near the North Carolina legislative building, after a march through downtown. "To all our legislators, remember we will be voting soon," Smith said. "And that will be evident in the next election."

One of those legislators took the stage later, telling the crowd that "your loudest voice is your vote." Rep. Cynthia Ball, D-Wake, said she hopes her fellow politicians see the large crowds at the rallies and are convinced to pass laws strengthening gun control rules. "Your energy gives me hope we've finally reached a tipping point," Ball said.

One of the thousands of marchers in Raleigh Saturday was Will Arrington, a senior at UNC-Chapel Hill. He said that while he's a consistent Democratic voter, he never goes to rallies or marches. But he volunteers at Culbreth Middle School in Chapel Hill, working with kids who are immigrants or refugees. And he's angry that many of their families came here to escape violence, but the children can't be sure they won't get shot at school in America either. Then he heard the suggestions to scare off potential school shooters by arming teachers. "This was it for me," Arrington said. "I was like, 'Kids are getting killed in schools and the solution is to put more guns in schools? No.'" Recent polling shows most people, including nearly all teachers, agree with Arrington. (Will Doran, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/25/18)

Asheville Air Quality

A wave of new electric car charging stations could soon be sweeping the mountains, along with, cleaner-running school buses, city buses and garbage trucks and overall sweeter-smelling air in the wake of a national, multibillion-dollar air quality violation settlement with Volkswagen. The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality will hold public meetings on the just-released Draft State Mitigation Plan. The plan outlines proposals for investing the first phase of North Carolina's \$92 million share of a national settlement with Volkswagen in projects aimed at reducing pollution impacts from diesel emissions. The first of five meetings across the state is Monday in Asheville at the Land of Sky Regional Council.

In 2016, the German automaker was found to have manipulated the diesel emission controls on its 2- and 3-liter engines to make them appear to be in compliance with nitrogen oxide (NOx) emission standards, when they, in fact, were not, a violation of the Clean Air Act, said Brian Phillips, N.C. DEQ mobile sources compliance supervisor. In an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Volkswagen accepted a \$14.9 billion penalty. Settlement funds were distributed among every state, based on the number of 2- and 3-liter diesel engine vehicles on their roads. Phillips said North Carolina ranks ninth highest in the country, with some 19,000 Volkswagens registered in the state.

The bulk of the settlement funds -- \$10 billion -- is being used to buy back or modify vehicles found to have had rigged emissions devices. A \$2 billion chunk will go to investment in zero-emission vehicles and infrastructure, that is, electric charging stations and \$2.9 billion will go to fund environmental mitigation projects. Of this last batch of funds, North Carolina will receive \$92 million for projects aimed at lowering emissions NOx, the main component in ground-level ozone, which in high levels is a health hazard, and also contribute to greenhouse gases, the driving force behind climate change, said Bill Eaker, Land of Sky Clean Vehicles Coalition coordinator. "This is a huge infusion of money and it's a wonderful opportunity for fleets to go to cleaner-burning alternatives," Eaker said. "By converting older diesel and buses and truck made pre-2010 -- the dirty diesels -- and replacing them with electric, hybrid or natural gas engines, it will reduce NOx emissions, which lead to ground level ozone and greenhouse pollution and particulates in the air." (Karen Chavez, ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES, 3/25/18)

Blackbeard Lawsuit

In pirate lore, Blackbeard ranks among the foulest criminals of the sea, known for keeping lit candles under his hat to frighten enemies with a smoking face. But in a lawsuit that persists in federal court, a documentary filmmaker accuses North Carolina of committing a modern form of treasure looting: using his copyrighted underwater footage without permission.

This week, attorneys for North Carolina asked federal appeals Judge Paul Niemeyer of the Fourth Circuit in Richmond to dismiss Allen's suit, arguing that the state is immune from such complaints and that it posted small snippets of Blackbeard's wrecked ship for the sake of public good. "This case involves North Carolina's effort to educate the public about a significant episode in the state's history: the pirate Blackbeard's 18th-century exploits off the North Carolina coast," attorneys argued in court filings. A decision is expected within two to six months.

In 2017 court filings, the state said it is no longer posting Allen's work. It has argued that its settlement with Allen allowed for mutual promotion of Blackbeard's story and that state government officials are immune in lawsuits over this type of conduct. "The Department displayed snippets of Allen's copyrighted works for a noncommercial purpose," the state said in court filings, "to educate the public about an important chapter in North Carolina history." (Josh Shaffer, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Lance Sale

Charlotte-based snack maker Snyder's-Lance expects to complete its planned sale to New Jersey-based Campbell Soup Co. on Monday after shareholders approved the deal by a wide margin. Snyder's-Lance said more than 99 percent of votes cast at a special meeting Friday backed the \$4.9 billion transaction announced in December. The company's shareholders are set to receive \$50 per share in cash. After the deal is finalized, Snyder's-Lance shares, which closed Friday at \$49.98, will no longer trade on the NASDAQ stock exchange.

The sale means Charlotte is losing the headquarters of another major publicly traded company. The maker of Snyder's of Hanover pretzels and Lance peanut butter sandwich crackers was No. 862 on the 2017 Forbes list of Fortune 1000 companies. Snyder's-Lance is the product of the 2010 merger of Pennsylvania-based Snyder's of Hanover and Charlotte-based Lance, which has long roots in the city. Philip L. Lance started selling roasted peanuts on the streets of Charlotte in 1913. Snyder's-Lance has said the deal maximizes value for its shareholders, while Campbell has said the purchase creates "a diversified snacking leader." (Rick Rothacker, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 3/24/18)

School Safety

Two of Robeson County's state House delegates saw plenty of positives and possibilities for legislative action at the first meeting last week of the Select Committee on School Safety. "I was pleased with the quality of presentations and the diversity of viewpoints and expertise they offered. School safety is a multifaceted issue with no one-size-fits-all solution, and the opportunity to hear from a diverse set of experts was of tremendous benefit," said Rep. Brenden Jones, R-Columbus, who represents District 46.

"It moved along at a good pace allowing members to have input and ask questions along the way. I think both of the chairs (Reps. David Lewis and John Torbett) kept it light but serious to allow debate at times. One of the better meetings I have been to in a long time," said Rep. Garland Pierce, D-Scotland, who represents District 48. Districts 46 and 48 both include parts of Robeson County.

The committee, which is tasked with crafting policies, regulations or laws to improve safety at North Carolina's public schools, met for the first time on Wednesday. Jones, Pierce and Rep. Charles Graham, a Democrat whose District 47 also includes part of Robeson County, are three of the more than 40 members of the committee that was formed in the wake of the Valentine's Day shooting in Florida that left 17 people dead.

"I think we came into the committee with nonpartisan views for legislation going forward," Pierce said. "We understand that safety for the students and teachers and everyone involved is very, very important and we are taking it seriously." Jones and Pierce walked away from the meeting with ideas for avenues to follow toward improved safety at schools. "Increased investment in school resource officers is a great opportunity for our committee to work together," Jones said. "Other solutions like addressing behavioral health or making resources available to our students and educators are solutions I hope our committee will work towards."

"I believe there will be legislation during the short session as it pertains to the budget for the school resource officers," Pierce said. "The budget could help get qualified school resource officers in every school, and give schools the necessary funding to make the security upgrades." (T.C. Hunter, THE ROBESONIAN, 3/25/18)

Green Tech

Green technologies are driving rapid technological change and policymakers are working to keep up, a leading member of the N.C. House of Representatives said during Saturday's "Green Saves Green Expo" in Elizabeth City.

The first featured speaker of the expo, state Rep. John Szoka, R-Cumberland, spoke on lawmakers' efforts to support -- and adapt to -- the growth of electric vehicles and to bolster solar energy production. Notably, Szoka was the architect and primary sponsor of legislation, House Bill 589, last year that offered solar policy changes he says will save consumers \$850 million over the next decade. House Bill 589 also included a moratorium on wind energy. Szoka didn't seek the moratorium but accepted it to ensure H589 would pass, he noted.

To underscore the important relationship between technology and policy, Szoka opened his presentation with photographs of early 20th century New York City. Policymakers there banned horse-drawn carriages in Manhattan after automobiles became available, accelerating their deployment there far ahead of the rest of the country, he said. Vehicles face another transformation as electric engines are displacing gas and diesel engines, Szoka said. Lawmakers are looking at electric vehicles "very intensively" now to prepare for their increasing presence. "Electric vehicles are coming, because of consumer demand," Szoka said.

For one, he said, lawmakers need to consider how to encourage the private sector to deploy charging stations that will allow the vehicles to travel farther and easier. Government should not be paying for such stations, he added. Lawmakers also need to start looking at how the state will fund road repairs as electric vehicles further reduce gas tax revenues, Szoka said. He noted electric car owners already pay higher vehicle registration fees to offset some of that revenue loss. Lawmakers and utilities also need to adapt to the rapid growth of solar farms in North Carolina, Szoka said.

Szoka also discussed H589 and his concession on the wind energy moratorium. After explaining the bill enabled more solar development, including commercial rooftop solar, he said the N.C. Senate inserted the moratorium to "triple-check" that wind farms aren't affecting military facilities such as the Naval radar facility some 30 miles north of the US Amazon Wind Farm US East. Though satisfied with the Amazon wind farm's review and permitting, Szoka told the audience what he said he told lawmakers during debate on the moratorium. "I'd rather have 85 percent of something than 100 percent of nothing," he said. (Jon Hawley, THE (Elizabeth City) DAILY ADVANCE, 3/25/18)

U.S. 70 Interchange

Improved safety and more efficient travel to the coast are what one potential construction project in Lenoir County promises, but not everyone is excited about the proposal. A proposal from the NCDOT would convert the intersection at U.S. 70 and Jim Sutton Road in La Grange into an interchange, replacing a traffic signal with bridges and ramps in hopes of improving safety and mobility, not only in the local area, but for the larger region of eastern Carolina, by connecting Raleigh to the State Port in Morehead City.

Jeff Cabaniss, division planning engineer, says, "There's a lot of commodities and a lot of business that are going between those two areas so that's one of the goals of getting 70 to interstate standards." Thursday night at the La Grange Community Center, the DOT held a public comment meeting to allow people to air concerns over the project.

Amy Jones Whitley, local business owner says, "The access to be able to get to the business during operating hours I feel like long-term I would need to relocate."

By providing three different options to the public, the Department of Transportation is hoping to minimize impacts in the area as much as possible during construction and once the road is completed. Right now the project timeline would have construction beginning at this intersection in the year 2024. Representatives from the DOT say the goal is to move that date up, saying they'd really like to get this project done as fast as possible. They say that's provided all surveys and funding go as planned. The NCDOT will be taking comments on this project up until April 12. (WITN NEWS, 3/23/18)

Terminal Groins

The North Topsail Beach Board of Aldermen were recently given options on how to fix the New River Inlet. Photos of the inlet in the presentation given by Environmental Consultants with Dial Cordy and Associations showed that over time a large chunk of the north end of the beach has eroded into the ocean.

"Something really needs to be done to address the problem that we're having," said NTB Interim Town Manager Steven Foster. "As the inlet sits now, it's a problem for just about everybody." The water flow is unstable, Foster continued, and during the presentation showcased how the flow moves in different directions.

Out of the options available, which include a jetty or inlet realignment, the board decided a terminal groin would likely be their best option. A groin, according to the presentation, is a barrier to a longshore drift and is constructed of large rocks, among other materials. Several examples given to the board included rubble mounds, sheet piles, and natural coquina outcroppings. The town is now working to obtain a permit to allow them to build the groin.

In an email to Sen. Harry Brown, R-Onslow, NTB Mayor Dan Tuman discussed the previous attempts of the town to restore and protect its beaches, including a 1.5-mile project in 2011 and a 3.5-mile project in 2014. "Unfortunately, the 0.5 miles of beach adjacent to the inlet continue to have a high rate of erosion and it has been concluded that only a terminal groin will solve problems there," Tuman wrote. He expects permits to be approved no later than 2019 with construction beginning soon after.

This project, which includes the groin and dredging, would cost approximately \$12 million, Tuman wrote, with \$1.5 million in state funds, 67 percent of dredging costs paid for by the state, and the potential for a USDA loan to cover the remaining costs of construction estimated at \$6.5 to \$7 million, which the town has verbal support for. The town is hoping to partner with Onslow County, with the county paying the annual \$350,000 to cover beach maintenance costs while North Topsail Beach covers the costs of the groin and dredging, Tuman wrote. Foster compared the town to a state park, saying they often borrow millions to keep up the beaches which a large number of people use and enjoy.

The Holden Beach board of commissioners has voted to put on hold all work toward getting a permit to build terminal groin and to seek more time for public comment on the proposed structure. The action comes just days after the Army Corps of Engineers released the final environmental study for the project that's been in the works for the past two and a half years.

The board voted Wednesday during a special meeting to direct attorney Clark Wright to submit a

request for a 30-day extension to the comment period related to the final environmental impact study, or FEIS, for the town's proposed terminal groin. The Corps released the study March 15. Public comments were to be received for 30 days, or until April 16. "My thinking is the more time we have for comment, the better," said Mayor Pro Tem Mike Sullivan, who offered the motion to extend the comment period. He said the extension would also give the town board additional time to consider the report. (Amanda Thames, THE (Jacksonville) DAILY NEWS, and Mark Hibbs, COASTAL REVIEW ONLINE, 3/23/18)

Litter Increase

The residents of Davidson County have been talking trash, specifically the litter that has become a major issue since state legislators stopped funding for inmates to collect roadside garbage. In July, the North Carolina General Assembly adopted its two-year state budget without the \$9.5 million allocations to the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice to pay for litter crews and road squads.

Instead of the century-old practice of using inmates for community beautification, the North Carolina Department of Transportation will be responsible for the appearance of roadways by combining the mowing and trash pickup through independent contractors. Michael Davis, superintendent of the Davidson County Correctional Facility, said in previous years he had as many as three crews of eight men each working five days a week on removing trash from the roadsides throughout several local counties.

He said the end of the litter and community work crews came from state legislators, who were looking to reduce cost. The program required the inmates to be supervised by a certified correctional officer, and inmates were paid \$1 per day. "The state started looking and thought perhaps a private company could do a better job for less money," Davis said. "We have people who call us every day who are unaware that the program no longer exists. ... It was a great program. The inmates felt good because, not only were they getting outside, they were doing something useful for the community."

John Rhyne, Division 9 maintenance engineer for the Department of Transportation, said the agency was paying the Department of Corrections \$9.5 million a year to help administer the inmate litter collection program. He said the program was defunded in the 2018 budget after the number of miles inmates were able to clear dropped.

With the demise of the state-run inmate litter collection program, local residents have come together to create their own community-based trash and litter reduction program. Keep America Beautiful of Davidson County will become official when its members complete their first training session on March 26. It is a partner agency with Tourism Recreation Investment Partnership of Davidson County. (Sharon Myers, THE (Lexington) DISPATCH, 3/23/18)

Ferry Alcohol

Don't expect the ferry between Fort Fisher and Southport to be a booze cruise anytime soon. The N.C. Department of Transportation Ferry Division is in early discussions about the possibility of seeking a revision to the law that prohibits the sale of beer and wine on state-operated ferries. The catch: although a change would technically allow alcohol sales on all ferries, the DOT is only considering the beverage addition for its new Ocracoke-Hatteras passenger-only ferry.

Ferry spokesman Tim Haas said the department is not officially pursuing a rewrite of the law just yet. It was only included on a list of legislative ideas compiled by a stakeholders committee, he said. Still, it would be explored because the new passenger ferry will be the only vessel in the state's ferry fleet that has a snack bar.

Although a law change would open the door for all ferries to sell alcohol, Haas said the DOT would strictly prohibit it on all vehicle ferries -- including the 35-minute Southport-to-Fort Fisher ferry. "We

have absolutely no intention of ever selling beer and wine on car ferries," he said, noting it would require the installation of snack bars on the vessels as well. The Ocracoke-Hatteras ferry will be able to seat 96 people for its 70-minute ride. Haas said it's should be in the water and operational by mid-July, but there is no timetable for the onboard alcohol discussion. (Hunter Ingram, WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS, 3/23/18)

Health Sciences College

A study outlining the positive effects of a College of Health Sciences at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke is headed to the General Assembly after being approved last week by the UNC Board of Governors. The current state budget provided up to \$100,000 to perform a study on the feasibility of establishing the college at UNCP. The legislatively directed study charged the board with considering the health care needs of the region as well as the economic benefits.

"We are appreciative of the General Assembly's passion for improving the health outcomes of our region, and in the implied confidence in UNC Pembroke's ability to be the driving force to address these needs by forming a College of Health Sciences," Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings told the board's Educational Planning, Policies and Programs Committee.

The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at UNC and Consultstart, led by Dr. John Ruffin, founding director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health, both evaluated options and concluded a College of Health Sciences at UNCP could be transformative for health outcomes and serve as an economic engine in Southeastern North Carolina and beyond. (Mark Locklear, THE ROBESONIAN, 3/25/18)

Watershed Grant

A state grant has protected the forested, 541-acre watershed that filters miles of streams around a small mountain town north of Asheville. The town of Marshall, which has a population of about 900, had long wanted to protect the watershed. That happened when the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy used a state grant to buy a conservation easement from the town, permanently protecting the watershed.

The state Clean Water Management Trust Fund awarded a grant to the conservancy to make the purchase. Marshall partially donated the easement for the property. Salisbury philanthropists Fred and Alice Stanback and a grant from the state Department of Justice also contributed. Nearly eight miles of streams cross the watershed and flow into the French Broad River. The watershed adjoins 156 acres that the conservancy previously protected and is near a protected network of nearly 100,000 acres in the Pisgah and Cherokee national forests. Marshall no longer gets its water directly from the watershed, but could have chosen to log the property or sell it for development rather than protect it, the Asheville-based Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy said. (Bruce Henderson, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Charlotte Stadium

Memorial Stadium in Elizabeth is getting a \$32 million rebuild and will become the home of the Charlotte Independence soccer team and Charlotte Hounds lacrosse team. But the project relies heavily on county taxpayers -- much more than a tentative plan from 2016 that would have required the city and the minor-league teams to contribute most of the money. Mecklenburg commissioners approved the plan in a 8-1 vote Tuesday.

That earlier concept called for a \$24 million rebuild of the aging stadium. The Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority would have used tourism taxes to contribute \$8 million and the Charlotte Independence would have paid \$8 million. The county would have paid the final \$8 million. The plan calls for the county to pay for all \$32 million. It will own and manage the stadium.

The CRVA may help pay for a new artificial turf field, but there is no formal agreement with the county yet. The two minor league teams will pay rent and share revenue with the county, but their

projected 10-year total payments are expected to be about \$1 million less than the \$8 million floated earlier.

Under the lease agreement approved by Mecklenburg commissioners, the teams will pay \$185,000 in rent for their first season in the new stadium. That will increase by 3 percent a year and will total \$2.12 million over 10 years. In addition, the teams will pay the county a rental fee of \$8,800 per game. They are expected to play 30 games a year in the new stadium. Those rental fees are scheduled to increase by 3 percent a year.

The county will receive 15 percent of the revenue from parking, concessions and naming rights. The county will also get \$3 from every ticket order placed online. That surcharge doesn't include tickets bought at the stadium. The county estimates it will receive, on average, \$700,000 a year, or \$7 million over the first decade. (Steve Harrison, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Shelter Fine

A North Carolina animal shelter unlawfully put more than a dozen animals to death and was not taking proper care of other animals under its watch, state officials say. The Veterinary Division of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services issued Sampson County a \$4,800 civil penalty and warning for violating state statutes. The fine followed a Feb. 23 inspection at the Sampson County Animal Shelter.

The March 12 notice, signed by Animal Welfare Section Director Patricia Norris, accuses the shelter of premature euthanization of 15 animals, and inadequate feeding, lighting and veterinary care for animals. The Animal Welfare Section also claims the shelter didn't give 24 animals proper access to toys, human and same-species interaction, and space other than their primary enclosures. Sampson County was given 60 days to either pay the civil penalty or file a petition to appeal the case.

On Thursday, Sampson County Manager Ed Causey told The Sampson Independent he was surprised by the notice because it "was inconsistent with what I would've expected to be my ongoing operations at the animal shelter." "We are still evaluating the proposed penalty and evaluating what we might do," Causey told the local newspaper. "Certainly a significant portion of the fine we have determined we probably agree with."

During the Feb. 23 inspection, shelter records indicated seven dogs and eight cats had been euthanized before a required holding period of 72 hours ended. Some of the animals were put to death within an hour of intake, according to the notice. The report mentions a Doberman-mix dog named Griffin that was discovered "to be in extremely thin body condition and to have large open sores on both front legs." (Aaron Moody, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Wild Horses

A harem of wild horses was roaming parts of Corolla after crossing a breach in the fence that is supposed to contain them in the four-wheel drive area of the Currituck Outer Banks. Corolla Wild Horse Fund chief operating officer Jo Langone, herd manager Meg Puckett and volunteers corralled them all Friday and carried them in a trailer back within the 11-mile area north of the village. "They are a lot to contain," Langone said. "They are wild, after all." The herd traveled into the historic village of Corolla on Friday near the lighthouse, she said. They were especially attracted to lawns in nearby neighborhoods. (Jeff Hampton, THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT, 3/23/18)

Circumcision Protest

An 18-day "protest tour" of the Carolinas kicked off in Charlotte this weekend, targeting circumcision of male children. A group called Bloodstained Men & Their Friends intends to visit 17 cities in the Carolinas during the tour, starting 10 a.m. Saturday at the intersection of Sharon and Fairview roads. A second Charlotte protest is scheduled April 10, in the heart of uptown at Trade and Tryon streets.

Media outlets in other cities reported the protests included men and women dressed completely in

white with bloodstained crotches. They typically wave red-stained signs at passing motorists noting "foreskin is not a birth defect," among other things. "No one should alter the body of an unconsenting person without acute medical need," says a statement from the group. "The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees equal protection of the law to all citizens of this country. Despite this, under the false rubric of preventative medicine, 3,000 baby boys lose their basic human right to an intact body every day in America." (Mark Price, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 3/23/18)

Theme Park

A Raleigh man who wanted to take a whirl at building a theme park in southern Alamance County has canceled the project. "Whirligig Woods will not be built in Saxapahaw," Bob Baranick told the Times-News on Thursday. "Our financial partners have not been able to find enough funds. I felt we needed to build the park to a high level of quality or not at all. That's what North Carolina and the community deserves."

Baranick, who says he helped design theme parks around the world, made a splash last year when he announced plans to build the theme park right next to Saxapahaw. It was to be a whimsical "boutique" theme park at N.C. 87 and Stockard Road. (Bill Cresenzo, THE (Burlington) TIMES-NEWS, 3/23/18)

Legislative Studies and Meetings

Items in **RED** are new listings.

LB: Legislative Building

LOB: Legislative Office Building.

More Information: <http://ncleg.net/LegislativeCalendar/>

Monday, March 26

- 10 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, 544 LOB.
- 2 p.m. | The Committee to Study Rates and Transfers/Public Enterprises (LRC)(2017), 643 LOB.

Wednesday, March 28

- 9 a.m. | Joint Legislative Study Committee on the Division of Local School Administrative Units (2017), 544 LOB.
- 12 p.m. | The Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (LRC)(2017), 544 LOB.
- 1 p.m. | House Select Committee on Implementation of Building Code Regulatory Reform, 1228/1327 LB.
- 1 p.m. | The Committee on Dispute Resolution Options for Homeowners, Associations and Governing Entities (LRC)(2017), 421 LOB.

Monday, April 2

- 1 p.m. | House Select Committee on Strategic Transportation Planning and Long Term Funding Solutions, 544 LOB.

Tuesday, April 3

- 10 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, 643 LOB.
- 1 p.m. | The Joint Legislative Commission on Energy Policy, 544 LOB.

Wednesday, April 4

- 10 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Unemployment Insurance, 544 LOB.

Thursday, April 5

- 1 p.m. | The Joint Legislative Economic Development and Global Engagement Oversight Committee, 643 LOB.

Tuesday, April 10

- **9 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, 643 LOB.**

Wednesday April 11

- 1 p.m. | The Joint Select Committee on Judicial Reform and Redistricting (2017), 643 LOB.

N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings

Items in **RED** are new listings.

Monday, March 26

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality holds a information session on the proposed plan to use North Carolina's share of a national settlement with Volkswagen, Land-of-Sky Regional Council, 339 New Leicester Highway., Suite 140, Asheville.

Tuesday, March 27

- 3 p.m. | The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality holds a information session on the proposed plan to use North Carolina's share of a national settlement with Volkswagen, Kannapolis Train Station, Multipurpose Room, 201 S. Main St., Kannapolis.

Thursday, March 29

- 1:30 p.m. | The Fayetteville State University (FSU) Board of Trustees meets, J.C. Jones Board Room, Chesnutt Library, Fayetteville.

Friday, April 6

- 10:30 a.m. | The state Division of Employment Security holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Employment Security, Room A-502, 700 Wade Ave., Raleigh.

Monday, April 16

- 5 p.m. | The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality holds a information session on the proposed plan to use North Carolina's share of a national settlement with Volkswagen, Lenoir Community College, Bullock Building, Room 150, Kinston.

Tuesday, April 17

- 1 p.m. | The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality holds a information session on the proposed plan to use North Carolina's share of a national settlement with Volkswagen, Triangle J Council of Governments, 4307 Emperor Blvd., Suite 110, Durham.

Wednesday, April 18

- 10 a.m. | The NC Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission meets, 400 East Tryon Road, Raleigh.

Friday, April 20

- 9 a.m. | The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality holds a information session on the proposed plan to use North Carolina's share of a national settlement with Volkswagen, Cape Fear Community College, Union Station, Room 512, 502 N. Front St., Wilmington.

Tuesday, April 24

- 9 a.m. | The state Appraisal Board holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, North Carolina Appraisal Board, 5830 Six Forks Road, Raleigh.

UNC Board of Governors

Board Room of the UNC Center for School Leadership Development
140 Friday Center Drive, Chapel Hill **(remote meeting locations in RED)**
More Information: <https://www.northcarolina.edu/bog/schedule.php>

Friday, March 23

- 9 a.m. | The UNC Board of Governors meets, Ballroom C of UNC Wilmington's Burney Center, located on Price Dr., Wilmington.

Friday, May 25

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

N.C. Utilities Commission Hearing Schedule

Dobbs Building
430 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina
More Information: <http://www.ncuc.commerce.state.nc.us/activities/activit.htm>

Monday, March 26

- Staff Conference

Other Meetings and Events of Interest

Items in **RED** are new listings.

Monday, March 26

- **1 p.m. | Governor Cooper to sign a proclamation for Brain Injury Awareness Month, Executive Residence, Raleigh.**

Monday, June 11

- 12 p.m. | Candidate filing for Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor begins, local county Board of Elections.

Monday, June 18

- 12 p.m. | Candidate filing for all Judicial Offices begins, N.C. State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement, 430 N Salisbury St, Raleigh.

Friday, June 29

- 12 p.m. | Candidate filing for all Judicial Offices ends, N.C. State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement, 430 N Salisbury St, Raleigh.

Friday, July 6

- 12 p.m. | Candidate filing for Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor ends, local county Board of Elections.

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